

HUBERT VÉDRINE

Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of France, Founder of Hubert Védrine Conseil

First remark. For thirty years, we have been thinking and talking about issues in terms of the global economy – globalization – and were never able to foresee anything in geopolitics. The global economic approach turns a blind eye to geopolitics.

Second remark, very simple. I think Europeans, and Canadians, are the worst prepared for the Trump shock. Trump is like some sort of asteroid that crashes into the European continent. Maybe the European dinosaurs will become extinct, maybe not. There could be another outcome.

As for Trump, Europeans must decide where they want to stand together. In the area of trade and protectionism, the treaties are clear. The Commission has real competence. It does very good work. We must preserve the unity that, in theory, exists, even if Ms. von Der Leyen and Ms. Lagarde disagree on the right line to take. But Donald Trump will try to pit countries against each another.

In some areas, like defense and strategy, there is no European unity. Europeans are the ones who asked the Americans to protect them after the war. European thinking has not changed. President Macron asked me to represent France in the Commission on the future of NATO that you mentioned. At every meeting, everybody asks me to stop talking about “autonomy” because to them autonomy means a break, abandonment. We do not talk about the European Union. We talk about Europeans in the alliance. If Trump does what he says he will do, Germany, Poland, France, Italy, Sweden, the United Kingdom, etc. are in for a very thorny debate. We are not reacting as Europeans in the Union but as Europeans in NATO.

I am well aware of the shock waves rocking Europe, and Vladimir Putin has much to do with that. There has been a shift in awareness. Of course, we have a commissioner for defense, but that has to do with the defense industry, not strategic decisions. In talking about Europe, we totally mix up issues involving the Union, NATO, individual nations, etc.

The Trump shock will trigger a trade war. We shall see whether Europeans will still be standing together in six months or a year. Environmental issues will also come up. Will the United States become a rogue state, an ecological rogue? I think we can start using that term now. In the Middle East, because Benjamin Netanyahu has had his hands free since the beginning, one question is, will Donald Trump encourage or allow Israel to attack Iran? Ukraine will be more complicated for Europeans and the Ukrainians. If Trump goes through with his plan to freeze the conflict, he cannot just say, “I am ending aid to Ukraine period” because in that case, he will no longer be able to dissuade China from going after Taiwan, or anyone else. He will have to imagine something more.

But since the United States does not want Ukraine in NATO, even when Biden was president, Trump will ask the Europeans to go ahead with it. In Europe there will be a collective denunciation of a “new Munich”, but will we be able to convince the United States to be more hands on? And what will the Europeans decide about letting Ukraine into the European Union? What will be done about the other countries that have been waiting for years? Will the United States be persuaded to let Ukraine into NATO? And what will that mean in terms of article 5? Even more complicated, what if Ukraine does not join NATO and Trump says, “It is up to you, European countries, to guarantee Ukraine’s security with an army or dissuasion” because a “security guarantee” means a credible threat or dissuasion. So the war in Ukraine will not be frozen unless Putin is told, “We are stopping. We are going to take care of two-thirds of Ukraine to develop it, but you cannot attack it.” In any case, it will fall on the Europeans, who do not have a unified position despite years-long efforts.

Consequently, we are facing tough discussions and issues. I will not talk about competitiveness here because that issue has already been thoroughly discussed. We know that the answer will be the Draghi plan, but that has to do with the situation in each country.

I will add one more remark. With regard to the economic situation, Kamala Harris was not up to the election and Trump is a born showman. The American people want an end to globalization that goes too far. I think they also want an end to American progressivism, which began in the 1960s and has become woke. How else can we explain why, for example, Trump won almost 48% of the Latino vote?

What does that have to do with our session? We asked ourselves how Europe would react, in a context where many European countries are led by coalition governments made up of many left-wing parties, most of which have abandoned working-class people in favor of minorities because “working-class people are dumb, they understand nothing about Europe, globalization, etc.” People want a crackdown on migration and the elites are against that. That is why, in my opinion, the Trump vote augurs a tough discussion in Europe in left-wing parties and among progressives and their relations with the majority. These parties pander not only to minorities, but to the most radicalized members of minority groups. The connection with our session is that this might weaken many governments in Europe at precisely the time when they need to be united, strong and strategic.

To sum up, the Trump shock may paralyze and break up Europe despite impressive efforts made in recent years. Zaki Laïdi recalls this regularly and he is right. Or the opposite. With all this tension, what will happen in 2025? It is like forging metals: very high temperatures are needed. Will that create something entirely new? In that case, we must immediately start thinking about areas where nothing can be taken for granted, i.e., security and defense.

Terry Martin, Journalist, TV news anchor

Very good. Thank you very much. I have many questions about what you just said, and I am sure we can pick up on them as we proceed.